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Situation of and assistance to Palestinian women

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report summarizes the situation of Palestinian women between October 2005 and September 2006, in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 2006/8 of 25 July 2006. It reviews the situation of Palestinian women and provides an overview of the assistance provided by entities of the United Nations system, inter alia, with regard to humanitarian assistance, economic activities, education and training, health and the human rights of women. The report concludes with recommendations for consideration by the Commission on the Status of Women.

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 2006/8 on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women, the Economic and Social Council, concerned about the grave situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, requested the Secretary-General to continue to review the situation, to assist Palestinian women by all available means, including those laid out in the previous report of the Secretary-General on the situation of and assistance to Palestinian women (E/CN.6/2006/4) and to submit to the Commission on the Status of Women at its fifty-first session a report, including information provided by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution.

2. The present report covers the period from October 2005 to September 2006. The report reviews the situation of Palestinian women based on information from United Nations bodies or individuals that monitor the situation of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Such bodies and individuals include the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967 and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.

3. The report also reflects information submitted by entities of the United Nations system that provide assistance to Palestinian women, including the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Public Information, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and the World Bank.

4. The report provides recommendations on improving the situation of Palestinian women, including through the continued assistance of the United Nations system.

II. Situation of Palestinian women

5. The period under review was marked by several major developments. It was dominated by the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank and the election of new parliaments in both Israel and the Palestinian Authority, resulting in the subsequent nomination of new Governments.[1] After the election of Hamas in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the fiscal deficit widened as, inter alia, the Government of Israel began to withhold the payment of the taxes and duties collected on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.[2] Prospects for continued international financial support for the Palestinian Authority diminished, leading to a risk of contraction in the Palestinian economy.[3] The United States and the European Union announced a freeze on their assistance to the Palestinian Authority until it commits to the three principles spelled out by the Quartet on 30 January 2006, while maintaining direct assistance to the Palestinian people.[4]

6. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, movement was limited as a result of checkpoints, curfews, closures and the separation barrier and its associated regime.[5] A climate of economic uncertainty and social hardship continued throughout 2005 and 2006, worsened by recurring violence, ongoing construction of the separation barrier, restrictions on movement, land confiscation, house demolitions, arrests and detentions by the Israeli authorities and intensification, from August onwards, of the fiscal crisis.[6]

7. Increased restrictions on free movement in and out of the Gaza Strip and within the West Bank left many women unable to access basic services.[7] Access by some villagers to nearby urban centres had improved temporarily when the number of closure obstacles decreased to 376 between February and August 2005.[8] The Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 noted, however, that the number of checkpoints increased from 376 in August 2005 to over 500 in August 2006.[9] As a result, Palestinian women currently live under conditions of forced isolation and are often separated from their families and communities, which provide support, safety and solace.[10]

8. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate in the Gaza Strip due to shortages of electricity and water, caused by the 28 June 2006 bombing by the Israeli Air Force of the Gaza power plant, and the continued sporadic opening of only some of Gaza's crossing points.[11] The substantial reduction of the electricity and fuel supply,

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[1] A/61/80-E/2006/72, para. 75.
[2] Ibid., para. 65.
[3] Ibid., para. 8.
[4] Ibid., para. 6.
[5] UNRWA contribution to the report (2006).
[6] A/61/80-E/2006/72, para. 8.
[7] OCHA contribution to the report (2006).
[8] A/61/67-E/2006/13, para. 24.
[9] A/HRC/2/5, p. 2.
[10] OCHA contribution to the report (2006).
[11] Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Occupied Palestinian Territory, Gaza Strip Situation Report, 12 July 2006, 12 p.m.

together with the disruption of water supplies, had a severe impact on the daily life of Palestinians who were without light at night and electricity to do their cooking.[12]

9. Women account for 49.4 per cent of the Palestinian population, a total of 1.86 million,[13] in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. While only 13.8 per cent of overall households in the refugee population were female-headed, such households accounted for 46 per cent of the special hardship families, illustrating the burden of poverty borne by women in the refugee population.[14] Special hardship assistance was provided to 386 families headed by widowed, divorced or abandoned women.[15]

10. According to the report of the Director-General of ILO on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories, four out of every 10 Palestinians in the territory were living in poverty on less than $2.10 a day. The absolute figure increased from 600,000 in 1999 to 1,600,000 in 2005.[16] The poverty rate was nearly 50 per cent in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with the Gaza Strip rate at approximately 70 per cent in May 2006.[17] Spiralling poverty rates owing to the ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis had a disproportionate impact on Palestinian women and increased the vulnerability of youths and young women.[18]

11. The school enrolment ratio of girls as compared to that of boys is almost equal for primary and secondary education.[19] Gender stereotypes continued to exist in the school curricula.[20] The Palestinian Higher Education Statistics Report (2004) indicated that more female students (5,043) than male students (4,829) were enrolled in the science and technology fields. Although women accounted for approximately 50 per cent of information technology graduates between 2002 and 2005, only 3 per cent of them were employed in the field, compared to 67 per cent of male graduates.[21]

12. According to the 2006 report of the Secretary-General on assistance to the Palestinian people, continued closures within and between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank severely challenged the Palestinian health system's ability to function at appropriate levels.[22] WHO noted that the financial crisis threatened to undermine the delivery of health services that served the majority of the Palestinian population, including women.[23] UNICEF's Humanitarian Action Report 2006 also noted that

[12] A/HRC/2/5, para. 15.

[13] Focus 2005, Vol. 4, published by UNDP Communications Office, Programme of Assistance to Palestinian People, p. 45.

[14] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixtieth Session, Supplement No. 13* (A/60/13), para. 120.

[15] Ibid.

[16] ILO (2006) report of the Director-General on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories, page iv.

[17] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/61/35), para. 32.

[18] UNDP contribution to the report (2006).

[19] Ibid.

[20] UNFPA "Gender-based violence in Occupied Palestinian Territory", Women, Peace and Security Initiative, Technical Support Division, 2006.

[21] Focus 2005, Vol. 4, published by Communications Office of the UNDP/Programme of Assistance to Palestinian People, p. 19.

[22] A/61/80-E/2006/72, para. 53.

[23] WHO contribution to the report (2006).

basic equipment for maternal and newborn health was lacking in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.[24]

13. Food insecurity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory was the result, in part, of the absence of purchasing power, as few people had sufficient money to cover their family's basic food needs.[25] The results of a study conducted by UNRWA revealed that, in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank respectively, 54.7 per cent and 34.3 per cent of children aged 6 to 36 months were anaemic, as were 40.2 per cent and 29.9 per cent of pregnant women and 45.7 per cent and 23 per cent of nursing mothers. Other micronutrient deficiencies of concern were subclinical vitamin A deficiency, rickets and iodine deficiency.[26]

14. The Palestine refugee population has one of the highest birth rates in the region, as approximately one third of Palestinian refugee women marry before the age of 18.[27] Approximately 39.4 per cent of the Palestinian refugee population is below 18 years of age and 24.6 per cent consists of women of reproductive age.[28] The total refugee fertility rates vary from 2.5 and 2.6 in the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon to 4.4 in the Gaza Strip.[29] As a result of increased literacy, generalized socio-economic hardship, increased public awareness of the need for child spacing and the widespread use of modern contraceptive methods, the historically high population growth rates of more than 3.5 per cent among the Palestinian refugees over the past two decades slowed to 2.5 per cent.[30] This trend, however, has been reversed in the Gaza Strip since the beginning of the humanitarian crisis in 2000.[31]

15. According to the 2004 labour force statistics of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, women accounted for 15.9 per cent of the total labour force in the West Bank and for 9.1 per cent in the Gaza Strip. The share in Jerusalem was the lowest in the West Bank, accounting for only 10.1 per cent.[32] Female employment rates have historically been low in the entire region; however, they have declined even further with the crisis.[33] Unemployment among the working female population stands at 19.6 per cent.[34] The closure and separation of the rest of the West Bank from East Jerusalem has limited the access of women from East Jerusalem to employment opportunities.[35]

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[24] UNICEF Humanitarian Action Report 2006, p. 106.

[25] A/HRC/2/5, para. 32.

[26] A/61/67-E/2006/13, para. 55.

[27] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixtieth Session, Supplement No. 13* (A/60/13), para. 67.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Millennium Development Goals, Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2005 Progress Report, December 2005, p. 34.

[33] ILO (2006) report of the Director-General on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories, para. 79.

[34] Focus 2005, vol. 4, published by Communications Office of the UNDP/Programme of Assistance to Palestinian People, p. 45.

[35] Millennium Development Goals, Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2005 Progress Report, December 2005, p. 34.

16. Despite their low participation in the workforce, Palestinian women have traditionally played a major role in agricultural production.[36] Nearly 90 per cent of unpaid female family members are engaged in agricultural work.[37] With the loss of land to Israel, Palestinian women are affected by the loss of both a vital source of income and their role as economic producers.[38]

17. During the reporting period, the labour market of the Occupied Palestinian Territory was subject to persistent and unpredictable security restrictions on the movement of people and products.[39] Higher levels of conflict and closure also placed a greater economic and psychological burden on Palestinian women, who not only remained primarily responsible for running the household and caring for family members, but also increasingly engaged in informal employment or self-employment activities to supplement their household incomes.[40]

18. To compensate for lost household income, more Palestinian women were initiating various types of income-generating activities with the support of microcredit institutions.[41] Despite the difficult environment prevailing in the West Bank and Gaza, the number of women participating in savings and credit associations increased by 6 per cent, the savings mobilized increased by 24 per cent and the total amount of loans increased by 32 per cent.[42] The total number of women members in the savings and credit associations stood at 5,636 persons and their savings reached $1,471,524.[43] The total number of loans issued by the savings and credit associations reached 3,634 loans.[44] The savings and credit associations' loans provided employment opportunities to female and male members of the households and improved the overall income of the beneficiaries.[45]

19. Employment opportunities were limited for women,[46] as illustrated, for example, by the fact that Palestinian women accounted for 31.2 per cent of lawyers, 21.4 per cent of journalists and 11.7 per cent of doctors.[47] The female Palestinian labour force continued to be heavily concentrated in agriculture and services, whereas the male labour force is more evenly distributed across the main sectors.[48]

20. Palestinian women have limited access to decision-making. Only 9 per cent of judges and 12.2 per cent of prosecutors in the Occupied Palestinian Territory were women.[49] The Millennium Development Goals Report for the Occupied Palestinian

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[36] A/61/67-E/2006/13, para. 73.

[37] World Bank (2006) "West Bank and Gaza, Economic Update and Potential Outlook", p. 24.

[38] A/61/67-E/2006/13, para. 73.

[39] ILO (2006) report of the Director-General on the situation of workers of the occupied Arab territories, preface.

[40] Ibid., para. 38.

[41] Ibid., para. 90.

[42] IFAD contribution to the report (2006).

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] ILO (2006) report of the Director-General on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories, para. 106.

[47] Focus 2005, Vol. 4, published by Communications Office of the UNDP/Programme of Assistance to Palestinian People, p. 45.

[48] Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics cited in World Bank (2006) "West Bank and Gaza, Education Sector Analysis", para. 123.

[49] Focus 2005, Vol. 4, published by Communications Office of the UNDP/Programme of Assistance to Palestinian People, p. 45.

Territories (2005) pointed out that the political participation of women in Palestinian society is low.[50] The proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament remained 5.7 per cent from 1995 to 2004.[51] At the level of local government, women's political participation in 2005 was higher, at 19.3 per cent in the West Bank and 17 per cent in the Gaza Strip.[52] By 2005, more than seven ministries had established gender units, including the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Local Government.[53]

21. Although the Palestinian Constitution promotes gender equality, this is not always reflected in the drafting or implementation of laws and legislation.[54] Palestinian women are subjected to discrimination under the laws governing marriage, divorce, the custody of children, inheritance and domestic violence.[55]

22. As reported by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, the occupation and the separation barrier continued to violate Palestinian women's rights.[56] The Special Rapporteur noted that the barrier in Jerusalem, in particular, resulted in the separation of families, as husbands and wives may separate to allow the Jerusalem identity holder to retain his or her benefits.[57] Furthermore, an Israeli law on citizenship prohibited Palestinians who marry Israeli Arabs from living with their spouses in Israel.[58]

23. Continuous violence took an intolerable toll on the physical and psychological well-being of Palestinian women.[59] Every aspect of their daily lives was impacted by violence and restrictions on their freedom and dignity.[60]

24. A case study on gender-based violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, commissioned by UNFPA and presented to an international symposium in Brussels in June 2006,[61] suggested that gender-based violence was increasing as a result of the increased political tension and violence.[62] According to a report released by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in February 2006 on domestic violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,[63] 61.7 per cent of married women had been exposed to psychological abuse, 23.3 per cent to physical abuse and 10.6 per cent to

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[50] Millennium Development Goals, Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2005 Progress Report, December 2005, p. 32.

[51] Ibid., p. 34.

[52] Ibid., p. 34.

[53] Focus 2005, Vol. 4, published by Communications Office of the UNDP/Programme of Assistance to Palestinian People, p. 5.

[54] Millennium Development Goals, Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2005 Progress Report, December 2005, p. 34.

[55] UNFPA "Reassessing institutional support for Security Council resolution 1325, defining the UNFPA role and strengthening support for women affected by conflict" consultative meeting, Bucharest, 17-20 October 2005.

[56] E/CN.4/2006/29, para. 46.

[57] A/HRC/2/5, para. 63.

[58] Ibid.

[59] OCHA contribution to the report (2006).

[60] Ibid.

[61] www.unfpa.org/emergencies/symposium06/index.htm (accessed on 4 October 2006).

[62] UNFPA contribution to the report (2006).

[63] Palestinian National Authority, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, press conference on the preliminary results of the Domestic Violence Survey (2005), February 2006, www.pcbs.gov.ps, cited in UNIFEM "Gender profile of the conflict in the Occupied Palestinian Territory".

sexual abuse. In addition, 63.6 per cent of unmarried women (18 years and over) were exposed to psychological abuse and 24.6 per cent to physical abuse.

25. Steps have been taken by the Palestinian Authority to address the issues identified in the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.[64] A quota law providing that women must make up 20 per cent of local councils was approved; legislative steps were taken to address crimes against women committed in the name of honour; the police and the judiciary were being trained on issues related to violence against women; and gender units were created in police departments. In addition, a ministerial committee was created to amend the penal code to provide better protection to women and provide shelters to the victims of violence.[65]

III. Assistance to Palestinian women

26. This section is based on information submitted by entities of the United Nations system for the preparation of this report. Nine areas of assistance have been identified: education and training; health; employment and entrepreneurship; participation; human rights, including the elimination of violence against women; humanitarian assistance; advocacy; media; and gender mainstreaming.

A. Education and training

27. UNRWA, IFAD and the World Bank provided assistance in the area of education. The UNRWA education programme is one of the chief means of contributing to the human development of girls and women. The Agency promoted occupational training programmes, kindergartens and nurseries, through 65 Women Programme Centres. Women Programme Centres in three camps of the West Bank provided refugee women with information technology training and assisted 73 Palestinian refugee women in obtaining high school diplomas. About half of the teachers and those enrolled in the UNRWA pre-teaching service courses were women. The IFAD three Village Community Multipurpose Centres were used to conduct training courses for women in various educational fields.

B. Health

28. Several United Nations entities reported on activities to improve access to health care for Palestinian women. WHO established a thematic group for women and child health, which coordinates project activities of different donors and implementing agencies, exchanges information, provides advice and recommends priorities for women and children's health. WHO also provided logistical support to the Ministry of Health, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNDP and UNFPA as required.

29. UNRWA undertook multisectoral activities, including full immunization coverage of women and children against vaccine-preventable diseases. UNRWA also

[64] E/CN.4/2006/61, para. 4.
[65] Ibid.

provided pre-conception folic acid, iron and folic acid supplementation for pregnant women throughout pregnancy, as well as health education programmes on the prevention of tobacco use, HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, the UNRWA community mental health programme in the Gaza Strip provided essential psychosocial support for Palestinian refugees living in situations of protracted violence and armed conflict. To facilitate gender-sensitive programming, the UNRWA health programme provides sex-disaggregated data whenever possible. To reduce gender-based health disparities, UNRWA encourages gender balance in recruitment and retention policies in its health programme.

30. UNFPA provided technical assistance on population and development, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, especially among adolescents. UNFPA strengthened the integration of reproductive health care in 39 public health centres and two non-governmental organization clinics. Through its emergency obstetric programme, UNFPA continued to ensure safe delivery for women in isolated areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In Bureij and Jabaliya, two innovative women's health centres continued to provide reproductive health care to women in two of the most populated and underprivileged areas of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

31. UNFPA also aided the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics and the Ministry of Health to identify indicators to measure the impact of the collapse of the health system on pregnant women, as well as on the overload of the maternity wards in central referral systems.

32. UNIFEM undertook activities to strengthen the institutional capacities of service providers in order to improve the quality of services, resources and information for women. Activities included gender training for the psychosocial teams employed by UNICEF in the Gaza Strip. Coordination meetings among counselling service providers were also set up. UNIFEM also worked on mobilizing and strengthening existing networks among non-governmental organizations to build capacity for better service provision for rural women. During the reporting period, 15 psychosocial counsellors and social workers provided psychosocial counselling interventions for over 1,000 women in the Gaza Strip.

33. UNV is implementing a project on solid waste management to improve the health and environmental conditions of residents of the town of Asira and four surrounding villages in the Nablus area. Women volunteers lead training sessions and organize and conduct visits to households to train other women on waste separation and proper modes of waste collection.

C. Employment

34. Assistance provided in the area of employment included training, research and the provision of jobs. UNRWA expanded the apprenticeship programme offered by seven Women's Programme Centres, to give 151 unemployed refugee women in Lebanon access to training and employment opportunities. As part of a larger research initiative, the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process assessed the impact of the Israeli disengagement from Gaza on living conditions, with particular emphasis on women's participation in the labour market.

D. Entrepreneurship

35. Several United Nations entities provided loans, grants and training to enhance Palestinian women's entrepreneurship. Phase II of the IFAD Rehabilitation and Development Project continued to have a strong focus on women's economic empowerment, primarily through access to microfinance and entrepreneurial skills. IFAD noted that the activities for women entrepreneurs had shown a great degree of resilience, as evidenced by the safeguarding of their capital and the continued growth of the enterprises. The IFAD Business Service Centre in Gaza disbursed 228 loans (amounting to $579,800) to women entrepreneurs for animal and agricultural production and, to a lesser degree, for food processing and handicrafts. A similar business service centre was being established in Jericho.

36. As a part of phase II of the Rehabilitation and Development Programme, two community centres in Azzoun and Jayyous villages were officially opened to serve the financial and social needs of women in the area. The Palestinian Agriculture Relief Committees granted 12 women's regional savings and credit cooperatives interest-free loans. Ten women members of savings and credit associations participated in an exhibition during the olive harvest festival of Bethlehem, in which the complete cycle of production of income-generating projects was demonstrated, encouraging other women to consider establishing joint projects for marketing goods and obtaining group loans.

37. During the reporting period, UNRWA disbursed over 3,558 solidarity group loans to women microentrepreneurs in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. UNRWA had a portfolio of over 12,980 loans in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with an outstanding portfolio of over $7.9 million, of which 23.4 per cent were held by women clients.

38. UNIFEM implemented projects in nine rural communities as part of the pilot phase II of the Sabaya programme, which focused on the economic security of women. Through this initiative, a total of 106 rural women procured equipment and machinery and acquired skills that helped them in the establishment of their enterprises. As a result, four income-generating enterprises were established, run and managed by the women themselves: an electronic bakery, a sewing factory, a day-care centre and a chicken farm. In April 2006, the Sabaya programme was expanded to include a total of 18 women centres in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A large cross-regional exhibition on the development and marketing of Palestinian women's handicrafts was organized, where products from some of the women's centres under the Sabaya programme were exhibited and contacts established with individuals, groups and organizations involved in the handicrafts sector, with a view to future cooperation.

39. UNCTAD established a Palestinian Shippers Council, chaired by a successful businesswoman. It actively promoted the recruitment of Palestinian women to the Council and encouraged women's participation in all Council activities.

40. Training activities to enhance Palestinian women's entrepreneurial capacities were provided by several entities. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) organized interactive training sessions for over 100 women as a means of upgrading their dairy processing skills. WFP provided Palestinian women with food for work and training activities, including the development of essential skills to reduce the gender gap in accessing education and training and

thereby support women's contribution to household food security. WFP worked to ensure the equal participation of women and men in all WFP funded activities.

41. IFAD continued to provide capacity-building to the cooperatives of savings and credit associations: 1,250 women participated in 14 exchange visits to analyse the performance of the savings and credit associations and exchange knowledge and experience with other members.

42. The UNCTAD integrated capacity-building programme (Empretec) promoted the creation of sustainable support structures to help promising entrepreneurs build innovative and internationally competitive small and medium-sized enterprises. To date, Empretec has graduated 123 entrepreneurs, 16 per cent of whom were women.

E. Participation in decision-making

43. Several entities provided assistance to enhance the participation of Palestinian women in various sectors. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs maintained close links with women decision makers, including briefing newly appointed women ministers and government officials on developments in the humanitarian situation and how they affect women. During the local and legislative elections of December 2005 and January 2006, UNDP supported eight non-governmental organizations involved in voter education programmes to increase awareness of human rights, democratic participation and better integration of women in the democratic election process. With the support of UNDP, newly elected women members of local government were enabled to participate in training workshops on finance, management and law organized in eight districts in the West Bank.

44. At the local government level, UNIFEM supported the mobilization of over 140 rural women in 18 target locations. A women's committee and a coordinator were elected in each location to represent all the women of the communities. Workshops and periodic follow-up meetings to develop a needs assessment and workplan for each location have been instrumental in strengthening channels of communication between women and their local government representatives, in securing women's access to key infrastructure and in ensuring their involvement in decision-making on the best use of this infrastructure.

45. UNESCO organized the international symposium on the theme "Arab women between east and west" in June 2006, with the aim of building links between Arab and European women and promoting the participation of Arab women in economic, social and cultural development. The Symposium's side-event exhibition, "Creativity of Arab women", presented works of Palestinian female artists and craftswomen, and illustrated their role in perpetuating traditions.

46. The World Bank Development Grant Facility supported the Arab Gender and Development Network. Fifteen Palestinian members benefited from an exchange of gender equality information with other members of the Network as well as research and training The regional research project on the theme "Arab women and decision-making", supported by the World Bank, included a Palestinian national research team.

F. Women's human rights and elimination of violence against women

47. Several United Nations entities provided assistance related to Palestinian women's human rights, including the elimination of violence against women. OHCHR followed developments in Palestinian legislation with regard to women's rights; worked with Palestinian civil society partners on the incorporation of international human rights standards into existing or draft Palestinian legislation; and held discussions with the Women and Child Department of the Palestinian Legislative Council, together with women members recently elected to the Council, focusing on the role and the rights of Palestinian women.

48. OHCHR, UNFPA and the World Bank provided assistance to address violence against women. OHCHR worked closely with the judicial reform support group in the area of crimes against women and girls committed in the name of honour, and informed the group about the cultural background and legal framework behind this phenomenon. In November 2005, OHCHR participated in an initial advocacy campaign launched by civil society organizations to address the issue of domestic violence and worked in partnership with the national human rights institution and civil society to promote human rights, including women's rights.

49. UNIFEM supported the development of a Palestinian Women's Bill of Rights, a joint project between the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the General Union of Palestinian Women, with substantive inputs from Palestinian human rights non-governmental organizations and women's non-governmental organizations.

50. UNFPA supported the development of the national action plan of the Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations Combating Violence against Women, which includes the use of training for advocacy and strategy development on reproductive health to ensure that the national legislation is in line with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and awareness-raising campaigns on the national action plan. The World Bank supported the Counselling Centre for Women in Difficult Circumstances, which provides support, therapy and vocational training to, and advocacy services for, Palestinian women subject to domestic violence.

51. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, OHCHR, UNDP and UNRWA supported capacity-building on women's human rights and on the Convention. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia supported capacity-building for 61 government employees from various Palestinian ministries — including the Ministries of Women's Affairs; Social Affairs, Interior, Planning, Justice, Local Governance; Economy; Health; Education; Finance; Labour; Culture; Sports and Youth; and Agriculture — through four capacity-building training workshops on the Convention and on preparation of national reports, in accordance with the guidelines set by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

52. The OHCHR training courses for the staff of the Ministry of Women's Affairs provided an induction to United Nations human rights treaties and mechanisms, including reporting to treaty bodies, with a focus on the Convention. OHCHR also conducted training sessions on the Convention and the development of human rights concepts for representatives of Palestinian civil society, including various human rights organizations and non-governmental organizations. OHCHR continued to

integrate women's issues into all training activities, including curricula, and to consider gender balance in the selection of participants.

53. UNDP supported the Ministry of Women's Affairs to provide capacity-building to gender units and staff in 15 line ministries on gender-responsive planning and research, and monitoring and reporting on implementation of the Convention.

54. With the support of UNRWA, the Women Programme Centres, which are pivotal in protecting the human rights of women and children, organized workshops, seminars and training on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In the Gaza Strip, over 19,000 women participated in awareness-raising workshops and in the Syrian Arab Republic, a large workshop was held on civil law and legal issues related to women.

G. Humanitarian assistance

55. Humanitarian assistance included provision of food, cash assistance, temporary work and access to health and other services. During the reporting period, UNRWA provided assistance to approximately 6 per cent of the Agency's poorest registered refugees (special hardship case families), 46 per cent of which were female-headed families. As part of its emergency programme, UNRWA distributed food to approximately 135,000 refugee families in the Gaza Strip and 75,000 others in the West Bank. During the reporting period, UNRWA created an estimated 1.8 million days of temporary work. Approximately 23 per cent of the beneficiaries of the Agency's emergency job creation scheme in the Gaza Strip were female heads of households. In the West Bank this figure was 17 per cent. WFP reported that at least 51 per cent of total hardship cases and institutional feeding beneficiaries assisted through the Ministry of Social Affairs were women.

56. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs supported UNIFEM, UNICEF and UNFPA in developing the Consolidated Appeal Process for several projects, including food security and capacity-building initiatives for marginalized women in 10 villages in the Occupied Palestinian Territory; reproductive health services; mobile psychosocial centres for women in the Gaza Strip; and psychosocial and reproductive health support to poor women in Gaza.

57. The World Bank, through its improved targeting scheme, under the Social Safety Net Reform Project, enabled poor adult women living on their own because of separation, divorce or widowhood, to receive cash assistance from the UNRWA Special Hardship Case Programme.

58. The socio-economic unit of the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process continued to monitor women's participation in the labour market and the effects of closure on their participation. Analysis from data collected each month was used in recommendations to donors and in a published study, "Economic fragmentation and adaptation in the rural West Bank".[66]

[66] Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process "Economic fragmentation and adaptation in the rural West Bank", October 2005.

H. Advocacy

59. Several United Nations entities carried out advocacy activities on the situation and rights of Palestinian women. OHCHR participated in various seminars and discussions addressing specific issues of concern on women's human rights, with the goal of highlighting how non-governmental organizations can use human rights mechanisms, especially Special Procedures. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs met with representatives of the Palestinian Women's Institutes, non-governmental organizations and decision makers, including the Ministry for Women's Affairs, and emphasized the role of advocacy for Palestinian women's human rights.

60. International meetings and conferences organized by the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Department of Political Affairs included discussions of the situation of Palestinian women, with Palestinian women and representatives of civil society organizations as panellists. Participants at the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People in April 2006, the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Middle East Peace in June 2006 and the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People in September 2006 discussed, among other issues, the impact of the occupation on Palestinian women and children, the most vulnerable segment of the Palestinian society.

61. WFP collaborated with the Ministry of Agriculture to organize International Women's Day celebrations in March 2006. To mark International Women's Day in the Gaza Strip, OHCHR held a meeting with 50 refugee women, highlighting women's rights and participation in political life, and participated in activities that emphasized the challenges facing Palestinian women following the recent Palestinian Legislative Council elections.

62. UNESCO inaugurated the Palestinian Women's Research and Documentation Centre on 18 January 2006. UNDP supported the second phase of the management of TAWASOL women's resource centres, which disseminate information on Palestinian women.

I. Media

63. During the reporting period, the Department of Public Information issued four press releases (two in French and two in English) related to Palestinian women. Through its UNifeed service, a daily satellite television newsfeed that reaches hundreds of broadcasters around the world, the Department distributed 12 stories related to the question of Palestine, some of which referred specifically to women and children. In its daily news programmes and current affairs magazines, distributed regionally and worldwide, the Department covered issues related to Palestinian women and children, in both official and non-official languages. The Department also organized an international media seminar on the theme "New challenges in the Middle East peace process and Israeli-Palestinian dialogue" (June 2006), in which two Palestinian women participated.

64. The United Nations Information Service at Geneva organized five press conferences during the reporting period on matters pertaining specifically to Palestinian women. The inter-agency public information and advocacy committee of

the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs published press statements providing the latest facts and figures relating to women.

65. Several entities provided assistance in film production activities related to Palestinian women. UNRWA produced the film "Mother Aysha", which tells the story of a woman in the Gaza Strip who freed her family from economic difficulty by starting a small business with a loan from UNRWA. UNFPA produced a film on reproductive health services for adolescents, entitled "Strengthening emergency obstetric care in Palestine", focusing on the work in reproductive health with refugees of the Jabaliya and Bureij Women's Health Centres in the Gaza Strip. The UNESCO documentary film on women's experiences, "On the road to dialogue", demonstrates the potential of dialogue for increasing understanding through joint Israeli-Palestinian experiences. In connection with the first Palestinian women's film festival, organized in August 2005 with support from UNESCO, the non-governmental organization Shashat set up a multimedia reference library in Ramallah on the subject of women's cinema.

66. Assistance also included training in media and news production. In the Department of Public Information Training Programme for Palestinian Media Practitioners (November 2005), six of the 10 media participants were women. UNESCO designed and conducted a training course for 10 Palestinian women journalists on television journalism and television reporting (December 2005). As part of its Sabaya programme, UNIFEM conducted training in filming, photography and web design at one of the phase I centres, which benefited 10 rural women from five villages.

67. The Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Public Information have included information about Palestinian women in their websites. The Department of Political Affairs continued to update the documents collection under the subject category "women" in the Internet-based United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL), as well as electronic links to relevant web sites outside UNISPAL. The Department of Political Affairs continues to maintain a special web address (http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/women), which allows external websites to link to the UNISPAL subject category on Palestinian women. The Department of Public Information, through a special feature page, "News Focus: Middle East", maintained easy access to a variety of source documents and information materials on the situation of, and assistance to, Palestinian women.

J. Gender mainstreaming

68. Several United Nations entities undertook activities to strengthen institutional capacities for gender mainstreaming. UNDP supported the Palestinian Ministry of Women's Affairs to mainstream gender perspectives in major sectors through the establishment of gender units in 15 line ministries. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs continued to highlight the situation of Palestinian women in its reports using data disaggregated by sex and age and data on the number of women living below the poverty line, or in deep poverty.

69. UNFPA provided assistance for institutional capacity-building for gender mainstreaming through the development of a gender audit in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The audit provided a comprehensive review of the gaps

preventing the effective implementation of gender equality and the empowerment of women in national planning and policy.

70. FAO carried out sensitization and training in gender analysis, including the training of trainers, to raise awareness of the importance of gender mainstreaming in the rehabilitation and reconstruction process, and of empowering existing women's associations to play a greater role in cooperative production and marketing. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) reported that its post-conflict assessments will include sex-disaggregated data on a systematic basis.

71. To support the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in national planning processes, UNIFEM collaborated with the Ministry of Women's Affairs in drafting the chapter on promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women in the 2005 progress report on Millennium Development Goals in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. UNIFEM also collaborated with the Ministry of Women's Affairs on the content of the gender equality section of the "country assessment lite" document (a simpler version of the Common Country Assessment exercise), in preparation for a future common United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

IV. Conclusion and recommendations

72. **During the reporting period, the conflict and the widening fiscal deficit adversely affected women in all spheres of life. Increased restrictions on free movement in and out of the Gaza Strip and within the West Bank left many women unable to access the most basic services.**[67] **The reduction of electricity and fuel supply, together with the disruption of water supplies, had a severe impact on the daily life of Palestinians.**[68] **Female employment rates, which have been historically low in the entire region, declined even further with the crisis.**[69] **Unemployment among the working female population stands at 19.6 per cent.**[70] **Palestinian women were not only primarily responsible for running households but were also increasingly engaged in informal employment or self-employment activities to supplement their household incomes. The Millennium Development Goals Report for the Occupied Palestinian Territory (2005) pointed out that political participation of women in Palestinian society remained low.**[71] **Gender-based violence was reported to be widespread.**[72] **Steps were, however, taken by the Palestinian Authority to address the issues identified in the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences.**[73]

73. **Entities of the United Nations system continued to make efforts to improve the situation of Palestinian women. WHO noted that the financial**

[67] OCHA contribution to the report (2006).

[68] A/HRC/2/5, para. 5.

[69] ILO, 2006, report of the Director-General on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories, para. 79.

[70] Focus 2005, Vol. 4, published by the Communications Office of the UNDP/Programme of Assistance to Palestinian People, p. 45.

[71] Millennium Development Goals, Occupied Palestinian Territory, 2005 Progress Report, December 2005, p. 32.

[72] UNFPA contribution to the report (2006).

[73] E/CN.4/2006/61, para. 4.

crisis threatened to undermine the delivery of health services that served the majority of the Palestinian population, including women.[74]

74. **The achievement of gender equality and empowerment of Palestinian women is dependant on a secure and lasting peace. Efforts should be made to ensure that conflict resolution, peacebuilding and reconciliation and reconstruction efforts fully incorporate gender perspectives and that women are involved in these activities, as called for in the Beijing Platform for Action, the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).**

75. **The Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Economic and Social Council at its High-level Segment in July 2006 underlined the important contribution that employment generation can make to post-conflict reconstruction and development.**[75] **The creation of an enabling environment for gender equality and the empowerment of Palestinian women requires ending discrimination against Palestinian women in the labour market, through both legal and policy measures, including eliminating occupational segregation and gender wage gaps.**

76. **The Commission may wish to encourage Member States, entities of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders to intensify their efforts to provide financial and technical assistance to Palestinian women, to fully incorporate gender perspectives into all areas of support to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to systematically assess the impact of these efforts.**

[74] WHO contribution to the report (2006).

[75] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Sixty-first Session, Supplement No 1* (A/61/1), para. 50.